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AUTHOR Abdul-Hakim, Suzzette Shoatz
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ABSTRACT

This practicum involved 63 children of 3-5 years who were enrolled in a day care center in a city public school. The practicum addressed the children's inability to verbalize personal needs effectively. Ineffective communication skills created problems in the children's achievement and progress level, and resulted in incidents of aggressive acting out and lack of cooperation. Hands-on experiences were developed for the children; a curriculum that included oral recitations, and lessons that emphasized cooperative play and learning were also developed. Older children in the school were recruited to help in a reading program; parents were to assist their children's learning; staff and parent workshops stressed the importance of oral language; and a grant for books from the Reading Is Fundamental program was developed and received. Results revealed that incidents of acting out behavior decreased while the focus on cooperative play and learning increased. Analysis of the data showed that: (1) the effectiveness of children's communication increases when the children's environment is stimulated by numerous personal experiences; and (2) new activities result in vocabulary expansion. (SH)

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Enhancing Oral Communication Skills of Preschool Children Through Partnerships, Hands-on Experiences and Cooperation

by

Suzzette Shoatz Abdul-Hakim

Cluster 26-A

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for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Robert Durso

Robert Durso

Field Coordinator, Comprehensive Day Care

Title

6600 Chester Avenue

Philadelphia, PA

Address

May 9,1991

Date

This practicum report was submitted by Suzzette Shoatz Abdul-Hakim under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Date of Final Approval of Report

Georgianna Lowen Ed.D., Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Enhancing Oral Communication Skills of Preschool Children Through Partnerships, Hands-On Experiences and Cooperation. Abdul-Hakim, Suzzette Shoatz, 1991: Practicum Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Preschool/Nursery School/Daycare/Child Care/ Parent Involvement/ Parent-Teacher Partnership/Parent/School/Commmunity Relations/Parent-Teacher Relationships/Parent Role/Peer Relations/ Heterogenous Relations/Communications/ Language/ Whole language/ Oral Language/ Hands-On Experiences

This practicum addressed the problem of the children's inability to communication effectively. The children in some of the classes had difficulty verbalizing their personal needs. There were numerous incidents of aggressive behavior and the staff spoke about the lack of cooperation among the children. The problem of ineffective communication skills created problems in the children's achievement and their progress level.

The writer developed a program that included various "hands-on" experiences for the children; developed a curriculum that included oral recitations; created lessons that emphasized cooperative play and learning; recruited older children from the school as role models in a reading program; encouraged parents to be a part of their child's early years of learning; participated in workshops with staff and parents that addressed the importance of oral language; created and recieved a grant from the Reading Is Fundamental program for books for the children's personal library.

The results of the practicum were positive. Analysis of the data revealed that children will communicate more effectively when their environment is stimulated by numerous personal experiences. The children's vocabulary expanded tremendously as they were exposed to new activities. The relationships that developed between the third and fourth graders and the preschool childrens were ones of richness and longevity. The monthly "hands-on" activities were exciting to the children, parents and staff.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The setting was an elementary school. It houses grades kindergarten through the fourth grade as well as a prekindergarten/day care program. The host community was located in a large industrial city with a population of more than one hundred and seventy-five million.

The school's enrollment was approximately four hundred and sixty children. Sixty-three of these children were in the day care program. A day care center program situated in a public school is a new concept introduced in this public school seven years ago.

The racial composition of the immediate neighborhood is 95% white. Socioeconomic levels vary greatly. Most residents are blue collar workers, generally in the lower middle class. Most women are homemakers. A large percentage of families are eligible for government assistance in the form of public welfare and Aid for

Dependent Children. Public housing is available in the surrounding neighborhood. Ninety eight percent of the families that live in public housing are black.

The day care center which was the focus of this practicum is housed in a city public school with grades from preschool through the 4th grade. The population of the school was approximately 400 children. The school is desegregated with a ratio of 38% white, 51% black, 11% oriental and other ethnic groups. The desegregation program is of uppermost importance in this urban school system. Special funds are allocated to schools that are earmarked as desegregated schools.

The racial composition of the day care center was different than the school. Three classrooms housed 63 children. All sixty-three of the children were black. Twenty-one children were three years old, thirty-two were four years old, and ten are five years old. Nineteen of the parents were blue collar workers, eleven were on public assistance, two were professionals and thirty were from the middle income level.

Financial assistance with child care was available based on federal guidelines. Even though some of the families were on public assistance, being at the poverty

level was not the only criterion for eligibility in this program. The parent must be enrolled in job related training, registered in G.E.D. classes, completing high school or employed at least 20 hours per week.

About The Writer

The early educational background of the writer was embedded in the local school system. The school system in which the writer is currently employed was where the writer received the first twelve years of education. The writer holds an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's degree in early childhood and elementary education. The writer studied for a master's degree in criminal justice and public administration. The writer is certified by the state's department of education in early childhood and elementary education.

The writer has performed the duties of early childhood teacher in the local school system for 22 years (7 years at the present location). All 22 of the years have been with the early childhood program. Nineteen of these years have been as lead teacher which is synonymous to center administrator.

Serving as building representative has been one of the high points in the writer's union politics. The writer has worked as an active member of the teacher's union and has run for delegate to the national convention. For many years, the writer has served as strike coordinator at the center level.

Throughout the school years, the writer has worked with the local high school as the job training coordinator. The coordinator plans the job training for high school students who are interested in the field of early childhood education. The writer has led many workshops for caregivers as well as fellow early childhood educators.

For three consecutive summers, the writer has served as summer play supervisor for the early childhood program. In addition, the writer has served as acting instructional supervisor in the year long program. Both of these supervisory positions have afforded the writer the opportunity to enhance the program from another perspective, instructional administrator.

The writer has been involved in many activities which combined parent activities and school issues. The writer serves as a liaison between the school and community. Some of the undertakings with the parents have included working

with the parent council, parent/teacher conferences, fund raising activities, child growth and development seminars, as well as sexual and physical abuse prevention workshops.

The writer served as group facilitator for a group of professionals and paraprofessionals who taught preschool through sixth grade and traversing the stratum of the severely, profoundly retarded students to the mentally gifted students. The writer was a facilitator for the schoolwide Instuctional Review Day in the Fall of 1990, a citywide effort from the Superintendent of the local school system in which goals were set to meet the challenge of enhancing success for all students by increasing literacy.

This past December the writer served as chairman of the first Fine Arts festival in the cluster in which the day care center was involved as a part of the writer's practicum implementation. The concept of the effectiveness and the importance of "hands on experiences" was incorporated during this "make and take" workshop that involved the parents, staff and children. Approximately three hundred and twenty-seven persons participated in this evening event.

Examples of the awards and commendations that the writer has received are Outstanding Teacher's Award from the parent council of the center in which the writer worked and an award for civic and community service from the

Chapel of the Four Chaplains. In the Fall of the year, the Superintendent of Schools presented a special letter of appreciation to the writer for a heroic act that resulted in saving the life of a three year old child. "Although the depth of appreciation for your selfless act of courage can never be captured by mere words, please know that we in the School District are extremely proud of you" (Clayton, 1990).

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The identified problem was that the children were unable to communicate effectively. Many of the children had difficulty verbalizing their personal needs. The number of incidents of acting out behavior had increased significantly. Complaints from the child care staff about the lack of cooperation among the children were being voiced. Limited oral communication skills had created difficulty in attaining the age appropriate achievement and progress levels necessary for a successful transition into kindergarten.

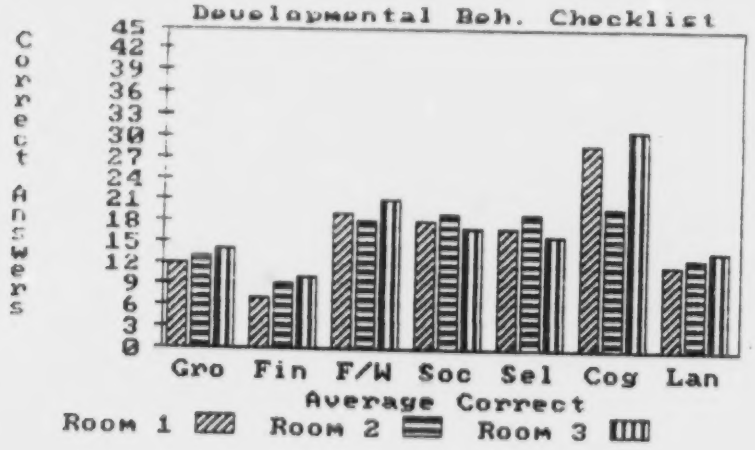
The ideal situation, if the problem were solved, would be an increase in the number of children experiencing more success and less frustration during their early years of schooling. The ability of the children to master newly acquired oral skills and the capability of verbalizing needs would be realized. The incidents of fights and acting out behavior would be decreased. A sense of

cooperative play and learning would be apparent in the classroom setting.

Documentation of the Problem

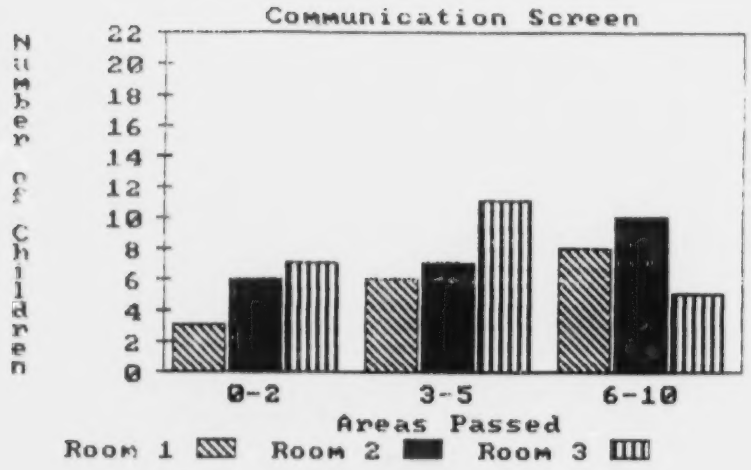
The number of correct items on the Developmental Behavior Checklist (School District of Philadelphia, 1980), under language and cognitive development had significantly lower ratios in comparison to the other sections of the checklist. Figure 1 gave an average score per classroom per developmental area. The developmental areas tested were gross motor, fine motor, fine motor writing, social development, self help, cognitive and language.

Figure 1



More than one fourth of the childen tested on the communication screen (School District of Philadelphia, 1981) failed because they did not pass two areas. Figure 2 indicated the number of children that passed per classroom.

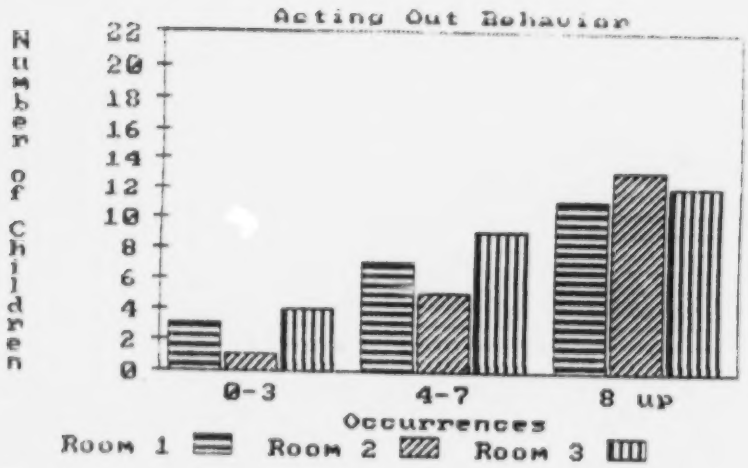
Figure 2



The kindergarten teachers complained about the lack of age appropriate communication skills demonstrated by children entering their classrooms. The limitation of their communication skills was evident through their inability to verbalize their personal needs and to experience academic success in the class.

Interviews with the day care staff indicated that the number of incidents of "acting-out" behavior in the day care classrooms had steadily increased. Figure 3 indicated the number of acting out occurences that took place in each classroom per child.

Figure 3



Causes of the Problem

Many of the children had limited exposure to neighborhood resources. The parents were not aware of activities that were appropriate for preschoolers. Commercially advertised events and activities usually exceeded parents' budgets. Often times, free or reduced

rate admissions were outside the neighborhood. The writer had noticed that the parents showed a lack of interest in reading story books to their children.

The vocabulary of the children was extremely limited. Little interest for the written word was displayed by the children. The attention span of the children was very short. Only a few of the children had personal books or libraries in their homes. Many of the children had minimal respect for the books in the classroom library.

The parents of the children worked or were in school, therefore time restraints were present. Exhaustion consumed what was left of the parents' free time.

Literature Review

America is a land with many diverse ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own unique traditions, customs and expectations. It is important to know how these various characteristics affect the communications between teacher and child. The children who are from different backgrounds from the majority culture and who depend upon a different language to communicate are often misunderstood or misclassified (Bowman, 1989).

Bowman (1989) feels that the importance of familiarizing oneself with the background of minority children should not be taken lightly, especially those who have language barriers and differences. The focus is on checking to see if there are traditions which conflict with language skill development, (dialect-non-verbal expressions) making sure neither the teacher nor the parents have language bias or unclear expectations. Bowman stresses family and school involvement.

The general environmental conditions which exist within inner cities tend to deter some children from developing good communication skills. Poverty, crime, overcrowding and other elements bred and perpetuated in this type of environment hinder children's communication development, especially oral communication. Parental involvement in the academic life of children in this environment is insufficient. The only reinforcement to learning that young children are likely to receive is negative (Borden, 1987).

Oral communication develops in stages. Each child moves through these stages on individual levels. The more a child is encouraged to use oral communication and the less the child is critcized for misuse, the more quickly he/she is likely to improve (Throne, 1988).

The first community that a child is introduced to is

that of the family. The family can be used as a resource to motivate children. The more the family members are brought into involvement with day care activities, and if the environment is conducive to learning, the more successful the acquisition of oral communication skills will be for the child. Parents are still the focal point of a child's initial orientation to developing language skills (Fisher, 1987).

Family, teacher and community connections are key in helping to enhance language skills and social development in children. The community which starts with the family can be used as a resource to motivate children through real life experiences and positive reinforcements. Borden (1987) indicates that one way to enhance the experiences of young children is by introducing them to local environment and community activities.

Stevens (1981) states children who score high on I.Q. tests are those who have experienced a higher proportion of language-focused "intellectually valuable activities". Parents are usually the main primary persons involved in the learning process, thus parents' and teacher's cooperation is essential.

Parents can gain insight into their children by talking with the teacher and finding out how to use the parents' role as the "senior partner" of the teacher-parent

team to guide the development of their children toward appropriate goals such as language skills and supplemental learning. Abraham (1986) says that parents play a special role in the all around development of their children.

Fisher (1987) emphasizes the importance of the parents' role in encouraging children to read at home in order to orientate and reinforce what the teacher is focusing on in school.

Karnes, Johnson & Beauchamp (1988) postulate that children from low income families have very real differences and difficulties surrounding their language skills development. The development of the child's skills seems directly dependent on changing the attitude and the traditional patterns which discourage language development.

Educators must provide continuity between what is familiar to the children, their home, and a developmentally appropriate curriculm feels Genishi (1988). " These practices, well supported by recent research, are full of events and experiences that make sense to younger children."

Hough, Nurss & Wood (1987) support the idea of creating a myraid of experiences with written language in the form of stories to enhance language. Opportunities should be afforded to facilitate this development both in the home and resources in the community.

Integrating formal and informal learning techniques will help to facilitate a more thorough language skills development program. Wingrad & Paris (1988-89) conclude that there are limitations in the development of a common, overall program in measuring or producing good language skills. Many existing programs limit the imagination and creativity of the young mind and make it difficult to judge the language skills of non-conventional children.

Children must be encouraged to participate on all human social levels because learning takes place constantly. Beardsley & Marecek-Zeman (1987) state that educators must understand and practice methods that relate to young people in order to facilitate language skills. They stress the significance of understanding how children learn and the importance of relating to young children. Another point is that oral communication is extremely consequential in the development of all language skills.

Communicative skills begin to develop in children even before they are verbally expressive. The interaction which helps to promote this communication is usually via the parent or caregiver. Freeman & Hatch (1989) theorize that by analyzing and correcting modern ideas of language development children will be able to experience more success in oral language acquistion. There must be a reevaluation of the assumptions about what language skills

preschoolers have and how they acquire these skills. This phenomenon is labeled "emergent literacy".

Trawick-Smith (1988) spell out seven specific conclusions in reference to how children acquire language. Consistent throughout this study is the proposition that children's language develops best in environments that are full of action, flexible, nonjudgemental, comfortable and relaxed.

Lane & Bergan (1988) conducted a study that measured the overall effects diversified levels of instruction had on preschool children's language ability. Teacher initiated activities, instructional time, aptitude and instructional levels that are age and ability appropriate were some of the methods. Lane & Bergan conclude that all of these methods had a direct effect on the child's language ability.

Educators of young children must relax and begin to learn what humors children. Honig (1989) states that caregivers must become friends of the children in order to insure a positive language exchange between adults and children. She concludes further that the essential ingredient in promoting creative and fluent language is a caring, receptive and responsive caregiver. Performing arts can serve as another tool for language skills development. Phillips (1985) reviews how a professional

actress can use her knowledge of oral language skills to promote and tap the natural ability of children by encouraging opportunities for creative dramatics in the form of plays, recitations and poetry.

Yawkey (1986) describes creative dialogue as the generation of imaginative and playful verbal and motor actions between peer group members. These actions, he concludes, stimulate an interest in printed symbols. This is the beginning of prereading skills.

Music helps to develop the passive side of verbal communication by requiring children to listen, infers Wohlstadter, 1986. He feels that tapping into the instinctive ability of a young child to unconsciously listen to sounds can be stimulated through music. Music also plays a role in developing language through speaking and singing. Weissman (1988) discusses the new tend of rapping. Rap music can provide good oral participation. He believes that music can be used as a means of allowing self-expression in children.

Dyson (1988) looks at the importance of art work. Allowing children to express verbally what their art work represents is a good way of developing oral communication skills.

Preschoolers develop good language skills when caregivers model and share their positive attitudes.

Throne (1988) maintains that sharing books with children fosters their desire to read and their ability to discuss diverse topics. Reading or discussing also emphasizes the fact that oral language is an important part of writing.

The use of oral communication is an important method of determining the level of a child's language skills. Sandel (1985) believes that children's expression in language becomes a teacher's guide to the child's thinking process. She discusses the importance of oral communication in the recognition and acquisition of knowledge by children.

Warner (1986) feels that children should be encouraged to read and communicate. Three components of encouraging children to read are given: the first, read with the children, second, read to them urging oral feedback and interpretation and third, reinforce the development of language skills through everyday experience.

Jacobs (1988) explains the use of dramatic arts in providing an opportunity for young children to learn about, use and develop language, especially oral communications. Raines & Isbell (1988) regard reading as the best tool for getting children to communicate in a more effective verbal way. Children must also become familiar with books.

Peck (1989) describes workshops she created for teachers on the benefits of storytelling in the classroom.

Peck believes that creative storytelling stimulates oral communication skills, an interest in the written word and receptive language development. As children begin to retell stories, oral communication comes into focus. Children should be afforded the opportunity to be the storyteller as well as the one who listens to the story.

Rogers (1988) observes preschool teachers' verbal interaction with their students. He feels that it is important to encourage conversation between teachers and children. One teacher is described as being genuinely interested in her students' conversation, she listened until completion and was sensitive to the children's needs. Conversation is a part of what goes on in everyday life and educators should allow for this in the classroom.

Collins, Gabor & Ing (1987) study the effects communication skill training has on the paraprofessional staff in day care centers both before they are hired and during their employment. The writers continue by saying that in a quality child care center, good communication skills are evident and paramount. Child care workers must seve as good models for the children and therefore must become astute in the verbal skills.

Studies have assessed the formal approaches to teaching language skills. Manning, Manning & Kamii (1988) believe there is some danger of becoming too academic in

the teaching process as it applies to language development. They discuss the possibility of "over-formalizing" the use of phonics in pre-language skill development, especially among children who have little or only home environment language skills development.

Brountas (1987) proposes that children have a natural everyday language which must be the building block upon which developing skills are founded. Therefore, a good language program must be well thought out and designed to encourage total development. This variety of experiences is coined the " whole language approach".

In a similar studies by Baskwill (1989), she suggests the use of a variety of reading, writing and talking experiences while dealing with all of the academic study areas. She talks about the importance of allowing the child the choice of the kinds of language skills that are of interest to him and she supports the "whole language approach".

Crews (1985) concludes that personalizing the language skills learning process will encourage children to become more involved. The method utilized is the incorporation of family history into the curriculum. The child as an individual will deal with his/her own family history. Many skills are acquired as information on the family is gathered.

Katz (1988) postulates that the technical and theoretical approaches to educating young children are easily observed. The age in which this development is observed and the manner in which it becomes an early learning experience, affect the child's future development. Oral language development is very important during this critical period of "communicative competence". The author also stresses mutual group conversation between children. Adults may or may not be present at these moments, it will still serve as an excellent tool.

Stewig (1988) discusses including oral language in the school programs. Curriculum writers have been presented with three tasks: develop rationale, plan sequences in curriculum, and evaluations, a heavy task for an already overwhelming curriculum. If educators, that is teachers and supervisors, pull together, perhaps oral language could find a justified, secured place in the curriculum.

Children learn through experimentation, personal intervention and their own personal feelings on how they become literate. Searcy (1988) cautions against closing children out of the literacy club by extinguishing their early attempts at acquiring language. Educators must become better listeners and not be controlled by the red pen or test scores.

Play activities can encourage communication skills.

Segal (1987) believes that in order for children to play pretend, they must assume different roles. The characters in these roles are required to interact and communicate with others with appropriate action and dialogue.

Williams & Kamii (1986) give a convincing argument for the importance of hands-on activities for enhancing language skills in the preschool classroom. Whenever a child is encouraged to be the one to solve a problem, through his/her own trial and error, the child is able to internalize the results. The experience immediately becomes more meaningful.

Simple activities designed to orientate and introduce children to the new environment of school can become great areas for developing verbal communication. Numerous studies (Nash, 1988, Phillips, 1985, Jacobs, 1988, and Church, 1987) have shown some school activities are designed to become wonderful encouragers of verbal communication. Even in preschool, some subjects motivate oral communication skills among other language skills and provide a head start into academic areas.

Church (1987) feels that when circle time is introduced at the beginning of the school year, oral communication can be developed. He describes how to turn circle time activities into opportunities to stimulate oral communication skills. Suggested are ways to structure

children's desire or ability to talk-talk-talk into socializing, learning and listening experiences through organized circle activities. Church acknowledges talking as the most important language activity.

Gorlin (1987) utilizes building blocks as a method of learning. Blocks with letters can definitely correlate with the early development of oral language. Worthman & Worthman (1989) postulate that social development skills are observed in children while playing with objects, games and other children. Adults should play with the children to enhance naming objects and to guide language activities.

Bettelheim (1987) recognizes that using fairy tales can serve as a means of developing a child's language skills. When dealing with reading fairy tales, a wonderful opportunity is afforded to dramatize the stories.

Strickland (1987) asserts the theory that creating an environment in preschool where reading and discussing stories are a fun part of the day will enhance oral communication skills. This method encourages children to read and develop self confidence in language arts. Even when sharing books and reading fairytales, it is important to talk with children and allow for their verbalization.

Hubbard (1988) discusses how to encourage, recognize and develop the individual personality of each child, through his/her drawings and writing projects. Strickland

& Morrow (1989) give convincing evidence for the importance of the physical enivorment of the classroom in the promotion of oral language. They feel that a library center, as well as a writing center, should be available with sufficient writing material available and accessible.

Various approaches are helpful to strengthening good self images, positive learning opportunities, effective communication skills and cooperative social competencies. Hart (1988) feels that projects should be developed for children that encourage good social practices while enhancing language skills. He suggests creative methods for communicative learning projects such as letters to "Santa Claus".

Talton (1987) reports that there are activities that create independent thinking in young children and open discussions within the classroom setting. By including children in discussions, self esteem is developed. Open-ended questions encourage thinking and language development. This type of questioning presents another opportunity to use circle time to encourage oral communication in the classroom.

Tudge & Caruso (1988) state that children are stimulated to help provide unique and different perspectives on problem solving. Peer group participation is utilized to work out new learning experiences and allows

children to observe how each relates to the other's problem. Activities are especially designed to promote social skills and oral communication between children.

Coon & Palmer (1985) speak about how well children retain what they learn and eagerly gather in more knowledge when they are asked to share their skills with younger children. Using different grades of school children interacting can help develop oral language skills. The resulting socialization and oral communication skills are considered highly profitable by-products of this experience.

Wood & Wood (1983) said "through talk with an interested and responsive adult, children find an avenue to discover things about people and through their reactions to them, find out things about their own social selves"(p. 149). Levine (1986) utilizes a method wherein the child is the teacher and this is known to enhance self-esteem, socialization and oral communication skills.

Hough, Nurss & Goodson (1984) reported in their study, "teachers talked with individuals and small groups some of the time but did not engage in active listening, share verbally or expand children's vocabulary or concepts spontaneously' (p. 45). The writers suggested that teachers should become more aware of the importance of active, shared verbal interaction between children and staff.

Rogers, Perrin & Waller (1987) in their study found that children initiated conversation with some teachers more than others because those teachers respected their ideas and the teachers genuinely appreciated the interaction.

Goffin (1987) states that helping children to understand and participate within their environment encourages them to work together. The writer reexamines how well preschoolers can see things through the eyes of others, not adults, but their peers. The results of this type of sharing suggest that the more children communicate and problem solve together, the more likely they are to be willing to expand this process as they develop greater language skills levels.

Holt, Kamii & Seefeldt (1984) support the hypothesis that children learn best through experience..."when they deal directly with the real world, people, natural materials, problems to solve and their own creations" (p. 20).

In conclusion, the literature that was reviewed indicated the importance of exposing children to a variety of stimuli both in the home and in the community. Programs must be incorporated into the curriculum that create activities that include the family as the primary educators of young children. Tapping community resources as a means

of encouraging children to become explorers has been shown to be a positive means of enhancing the oral communication skills of children.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Statement of Goal Goals

The general goal was that children would be able to communicate effectively.

Behavioral Expectations

The following specific objectives were utilized to help fulfill the goal of this practicum.

1. To decrease the number of "acting-out" incidents that occur during day care hours to no more than three per day per child. All sixty-three children in the preschool program were included.
2. As a result of the practicum implementation, the three classroom teachers in the day care

program will have at least two lessons per week included in their classrooms with the focus on cooperative play and learning.

3. As a result of the practicum implementation, at least one activity each month will be incorporated in the curriculum that will be a "hands-on" experience.
4. At least once each week, one parent per classroom will become the weekly storyteller. The parents from the fifty-nine families will be involved.

Evaluation Instruments

The evaluation tool that was to be utilized to measure the first specific objective, to decrease the number of "acting-out" incidents that occur during the day care hours to no more than three per child per day, was to be a checklist maintained by teachers (see Appendix B). All incidents of unacceptable behavior that occured during the course of the day were to be documented on this checklist.

Weekly lesson plans (see Appendix I) were the instrument to be used to measure the second specific objective. Objective two stated that two lessons per week

will be included in the day care classes with the focus on cooperative play and learning.

The third specific objective, to have at least one activity each month incorporated into the curriculum that will be a "hands-on" experience, was to be measured by a weekly calendar (see Appendix J) that documented the activities that were planned at the day care center.

The fourth specific objective, to have at least one parent, per classroom to become the weekly storyteller, was to be measured by an attendance sheet (see Appendix D).

CHAPTER IV

Solution Strategy

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

Enhancing oral communication skills of preschool children is a phenomenon of prodigious concern. Studies have demonstrated that family, teacher and community connections are key elements in developing oral communication skills in young children. Fisher (1987) infers that by working to increase family involvement in helping to develop healthy reading habits will encourages more verbal exchange in the home. Borden (1987) indicates that one way to enhance the experiences of young children is to introduce them to the local environment and community activities.

One possible solution was to intergrate formal and informal learning techniques into the curriculum to facilitate a more thorough language skills development program and incorporate the whole language method. Brountas (1987) states that art, music, science and many other subjects can be incorporated into the curriculum. The whole language method is thought to be effective in developing better language skills in children.

Baskwill (1989) believes that a variety of work areas should be provided in the classroom for the child to work in each day. Crews (1985) encourages children's language skill development by using personal family history and its' uniqueness. Dyson (1988) considers the effort of children to draw as a help in attaining several skills which are invaluable in language development. Organization, visualization and oral communication are a few of the skills.

Performing arts was used as a tool for the second possible solution strategy for language skills development. Phillip (1985) encourages children to memorize and recite as a means to expand their mastery of language arts. This provides a rich vocabulary which opens the door to expression and an infinite range of feelings and observations.

Weissman (1988) believes music can play a special role in developing language and listening skills. Wohlstadter (1986) feels, expanding a child's ability to absorb sounds while still a preschooler enhances his/her language skills later.

One can help children develop good language skills by

role modeling and sharing one's own positive attitudes with preschoolers. This was the third solution strategy. Throne (1988) establishes the significance of early book reading and discussions between children and parents at home. Making stories a fun part of the day, enhances oral communication skills. Storytelling is a method which encourages children to read and develop self confidence in language arts.

Strickland (1987) and Bettelheim (1987) assert that storytime fosters the opportunity to encourage talking before, during and after a book session. They recognize that using fairy tale activities allows a child to orally invent stories.

The fourth possible solution strategy was play activities that encouraged communication skills. Drama can be used to facilitate better communication and social skills and build self confidence, explains Jacobs (1988).

Segal (1987) believes in using the child's game "of pretending" to help develop communication and social skills. The characters in these roles are required to interact and communicate with others, with appropriate action and dialogue. Church (1987) incorporates circle time as a way to develop self esteem and at the same time

enhance children's language skills. Church instructs the reader to encourage whole sentence responses when asking questions.

Gorlin (1987) suggests that classrooms should have a variety of buiiing blocks. An open invitation to participate and to interact with the toy itself and oral communication is irresistible when a playmate joins in the fun.

Worthman & Worthman (1989) postulate that providing developmentally appropriate play experiences for children helps researchers observe cognitive development.

The final possible solution strategy involved having projects that helped to strengthen good cooperative social competencies. Hart (1988) feels projects that stimulate peer group cooperation and inter-group cooperation among children of several age groups can turn common social experiences into unique communicative learning projects. Talton (1987) reports that social skills and positive, cooperative peer interaction can evolve when positive self images and creative problem solving are implemented.

Tudge & Caruso (1988) state that all children can be stimulated to help provide unique and different perspectives on problem solving. Activities can be designed to promote social skills and oral communication between children.

Coon & Palmer (1985) describe the utilization of children from different grades in helping to develop oral language skills. The aspects of socialization and oral communication are considered highly profitable by-products of this experience. Levine (1986) talks about peer group teaching. By using the oldest traditional teaching technique, "He who teaches, learns", older children can teach younger children.

Description of Selected Solutions

The description of the selected solutions for enhancing oral communication skills of preschool children was drawn from a variety of resources, methods and strategies. The first selected strategy was the modeling and sharing of good oral language skills by the utilization of the RIF program in the preschool class. A school club entitled "Read to Me, Friend, Bookclub" composed of 3rd and 4th grade students was formed. The formation was based on the idea of cooperative learning through peers and older children at the school. The ideology of "He who teaches, learns" was incorporated into this selected strategy.

Additionally, a classroom calendar was published every month with the upcoming activities of the students included. Another selected strategy was the creation of a

partnership which involved the family, school and community. A monthly hands-on experience for the children in the day care center took place in the community and in the classrooms.

Some of the trips which utilized hands-on experiences that the children are still talking about were the trips to the potato chip factory, the apple orchard and the airport. At the potato chip factory the children had the opportunity of seeing their favorite snacks made. The culmination of the whole tour, which included a movie too, was the sampling of the fresh warm snacks right from the ovens.

"Pumpkinland" was the title given to the welcoming area at the apple orchard. All sorts of pumpkins were available for selection and purchasing. The area included a hay loft in which the children could climb, jump and play, a maze made from tall dried cornstalks, a petting and feeding station for small farm animals and of course apple trees were everywhere.

The group gathered together after leaving "pumpkinland" for a leisurely hayride through the farmlands and orchards. After eating a picnic style lunch, photographed for the daily paper feeding the horses, at the end of the day the children, parents and staff boarded the buses as equally excited as exhausted.

Four kinds of transportation were utilized to go to see a fifth mode, the airplane. From the school to the airport, the group began our trip to the airport on the trolley car. The staff and children then boarded elevated trains, transferred to the railroad station, boarded an actual train, got off at the airport and returned to the day care center on a bus. For many of the children this was their first experience on any other transportation other than a car, school bus or public bus. "This was surely one of the finest hands-on experiences that the children had," reported one parent. A parent shared that her child just could not stop talking about all of the different forms of transportation that they had been on that day.

The incorporation of the whole language approach to teaching into the daily curriculum was another strategy. Utilizing performing arts in the classroom setting along with creative dramatics was a vehicle utilized to ensure the whole language method of teaching. The children in day care presented oral recitations to the students from kindergarten through fourth grade during the assemblies for Halloween, Thanksgiving, Winter Festival, Black History Month and during the Spring holiday. The recitations have been one of the most effective tools for enhancing self

confidence, self esteem and oral language of the students in the day care center.

Lastly, the development of a classroom Big Book of drawings, snapshots, songs, poems and stories was created to document the activities that took place during the duration of the implementation period. The Big Book was created by building on to already existing props such as circle time and all other play activities.

Steps that were followed in the processing of activities planned during the implementation period were:

1. Research was conducted to ascertain what resources were available in the community.
2. Interviews were conducted to see what resources were accessible and available to the parents.
3. Cameras were acquired with enough film to be used during implementation.
4. Letters were distributed to students in the 3rd and 4th grades who were interested in becoming members of the "Read to Me, Friend, Bookclub".
5. Up to date catalogues from book clearinghouses were made available for RIF

6. An open house was planned to inform parents about activities for the implementation period. Classroom learning projects and themes corresponded with community based events.
7. Tentative dates were scheduled for trips and various other activities.

Report of Action Taken

The writer utilized a variety of curriculum materials to accomplish the different objectives. The Weekly Reader edition for prekindergarten was one of the methods utilized. Many of the weekly lessons included themes about cooperative play and learning. The themes often extended beyond the classroom into the home and even into the community. One issue focused on how the children could cooperate with the environment as it looked at the problems of pollution and trash disposal. Tangible suggestions were given to the preschoolers and their families that could preserve the environment and world around them. The teachers talked about the wonderful and simplistic way the theory of recylcing was introduced to the preschoolers. "Great vocabulary words.....recycling, environment, pollution, cooperation and even a better

understanding of the word, community!", was how one teacher spoke about the impressiveness of this curriculum tool.

Three activities the children enjoyed as was observed by the looks of excitement on their faces, were two special visits; one from the neighborhood librarian and another from the teacher representing the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals and finally the Reading Is Fundamental book distributions. The children prepared snacks, gifts and artwork in anticipation of these two special guest and when the guest arrived shared them with all that were present. The librarian shared some stories and brought membership applications for all of the children. A kitten and ferret were two animals that the guest from the S.P.C.A. shared. Following is a chronology of all of the activities that took place during implementation.

First, a camera was utilized throughout the implementation period that assisted in the formation of a Big Book of all classroom activities. A general parents' meeting was scheduled and the projected plans to be utilized during implementation were presented. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to any parent interested in the RIF activities (see Appendix C) and an Open House for the fall was discussed (see Appendix E).

Next, plans for the "Read To Me, Friend, Bookclub" took place. Rules and requirements were formulated. A trip to the orchard, potato chip factory, the neighborhood fire department, library, airport, a play during the winter holiday season and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals was scheduled. The resource materials were compiled and organized for programs during implementation. The writer conducted a workshop on the importance of enhancing oral communication skills of preschool children for the staff members and parents. The agenda (see Appendix E) included a guest speaker on this topic. Later, a trip to the apple orchard was scheduled. The children had the "hands-on" experience of picking and sorting apples and pumpkins, a picnic and a great time at the petting zoo.

The second month of implementation included plans to begin the classrooms monthly calendar. Excitement was felt by the writer as the recruitment for the "Read To Me, Friend, Bookclub" membership took place. Flyers, posters and surveys were distributed (see Appendix C). At this time, parents began weekly storytelling in each of the day care classes. In preparation for the books from RIF to be distributed, titles from various books were selected and purchased from numerous clearinghouses at a substanstial savings as a result of being reciepients of a Reading Is

Fundamental grant. RIF, as it is commonly known, is another outside agent that strengthen the relationship between school, community, family and children. To be afforded the opportunity of independently selecting exactly which books they wanted for their own, was a hands-on experience many of these children will never forget. As with the other activities, pictures were taken and placed in the Big Book.

An Open House for parents was held. A visit to the neighborhood fire house took place. The following day fire engines and fire fighters including the "hook and ladder" truck visited the school. The children from the two kindergarten classes were invited to join the day care children. During Halloween, an assembly was held. All of the children in the school including the day care center participated in oral presentations.

Two exceptional activities that took place in the third month of implementation were a trip to the neighborhood farmer's market in which fruits and vegetables were purchased by the children and then a salad was made in the classroom. The other was the weekly meeting of "Read To Me, Friend, Bookclub", another effective strategy. Throughout the implementation period, students from the third and fourth grades came to the day care classrooms during naptime and read to the children as they rested on

their cots. Many of the older students were having difficulty with their reading levels and a few of the students had discipline problems. Utilizing the strategy, "He who teaches, learns", served as a method of instilling cooperation among the younger and older students simultaneously. The older children were great models for the preschoolers and the friendships that developed were visually noticeable.

Additionally, a parents' meeting was scheduled. The agenda included scheduled trips and classroom visitors (see Appendix F) and the first classroom calendar was distributed to parents of children in the class. Throughout this month, the parents continued with weekly storytelling. In continuing the development of oral language, the children participated in the Thanksgiving assembly by giving oral recitations. A trip to the Herr's Potato Chip factory took place. Perhaps the greatest experience the children had was the opportunity to see the process from the start to the finished product of potato chips, corn chips and popcorn, as well as a taste test. Just as special projects took place during the third month of implementation, so also were the activtities for the fourth month.

A Fine Arts festival was held in the evening for the parents, staff and children from sixteen day care centers.

Approximately three hundred and twenty-seven participated. The writer was the chairman and organizer of this program. This was a make and take, hands on experience planned for the staff, parents and children to share together. Read to Me, Friend Bookclub continued.

In the spirit of the holiday, a trip to the theater was planned. An arrangement to have the children meet the characters in the play after the show and see costumes was another "hands-on" experience. Likewise, the children presented winter holiday oral recitations in the assembly program. Work on next month's distribution of classroom calendar began. Parents continued with weekly storytelling. A second workshop on oral communication skills was conducted for the parents and staff. The agenda (see Appendix G) included a guest speaker on oral communication skills.

Activities scheduled during the fifth month of implementation included the distribution of the bi-monthly classroom calendar to parents. "Read to Me, Friend, Bookclub" continued meeting bi-weekly. Club members helped with letters to "Santa Claus". A poetry exposition was held. The students heard poems from members of the "Read to Me, Friends, Bookclub" as well as shared poems of their own.

To enhance the activities planned during the sixth

month of implementation, the neighborhood librarian was invited to share a snack at the day care center. The children prepared the treats for their invited guest. The librarian shared stories and peoms. Along with this, another distribution was conducted with books from RIF. Later, a puppet show for Black History month was given by Mjani, the magician. The children were invited to share in the puppetry. Work on the classroom calendar continued. The children participated in the Black history expose' highlighting famous black persons.

The last classroom calendar was distributed and posters as well as children's art work was on display during the month. The parents who were able continued with weekly storytelling in each classroom during the seventh month of implementation. Next, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals came to the center along with young animals. The teacher from S.P.C.A. presented lessons on the proper care of pets. Incorporated into this activity was the handling of the domestic animals by the children.

Meanwhile, the Children's Literacy Initiative began. To enhance the fulfillment of the fourth objective and to support the importance of reading to young children, the Children's Literacy Initiative was introduced into the day care center. It is the Initiative's viewpoint that

children must be taught language skills to become successful adults. Four in-service workshops for the staff and caregivers was given in the preschool program as a part of a this project. The aim was to promote an interest and love of books, increase vocabulary and communication skills and promote success in the school's reading programs.

Four workshops were planned for the staff and one for the parents in the day care center. The workshops were held on consecutive weeks with the parents attending during evening hours. Finally, a special evening workshop was held for the parents of the day care center. The Children's Literacy Initiative conducted this workshop with parents and distributed books to all parents who participated. Twenty-nine families participated in this workshop.. All of the parents that attended the meeting received free children's books and a folder with information on books and facts about reading to their children. As a school that had been adopted by the International Airport, a culminating trip to the International Airport took place during this month.

In concluding the last month of implementation, the third and final workshop was conducted for the purpose of discussing impressions of the children in the day care center since the beginning of implementation. Parents and

staff members participated in this workshop (see Appendix H). A parents' informal social hour with the purpose of finalizing implementation activities took place. At this time, questionnaires were distributed to parents in reference to their reaction to their imvolvement during the implementation period, as well as the completion of the RIF summary sheets and reports.

Chapter V

Results, Conclusions And Recommendations

Results

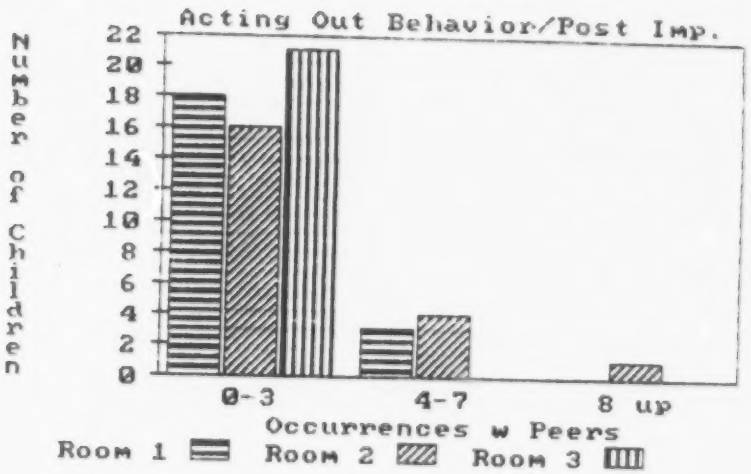
The writer selected a myriad of strategies and methods to implement the practicum entitled, "Enhancing Oral communication Skills of Preschool Children Through Partnerships, Hands-On Experiences and Cooperation". The results of the four specific objectives had varying degrees of success. The first specific objective, "To decrease the number of "acting-out" incidents that occur during day care hours to no more than three per day per child", was measured by a Checklist (see Appendix B).

Objective one was met by fifty-five of the children. All sixty-three of the children were not successful in reaching the goal as established in this objective. One must consider the fact that the eight children that did not succeed, were those children who are in the early intervention program. Children tested for this program have differing learning levels and diverse problems. A few of these children who are kindergarten-eligible have been

recommended for special mixed categorical placement in the Fall. The fact that eight children did not meet the objective's goal is not considered to be highly important when these facts are analyzed. The data also indicated that twenty-nine of the children had no incidents by the end of the implementation period.

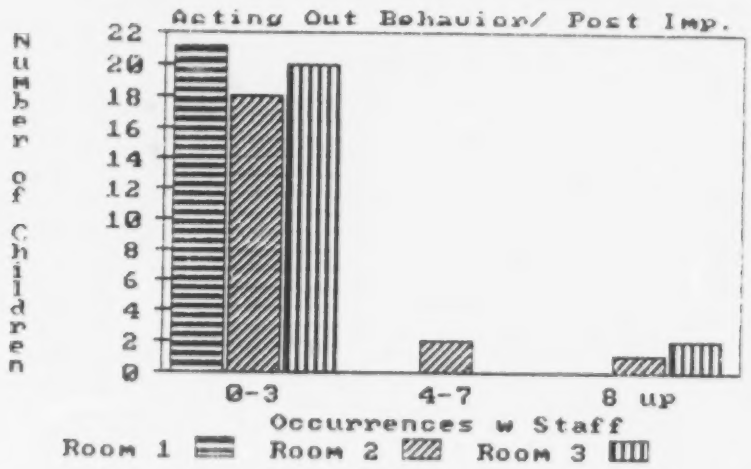
The data in Figure 4 gives a summary of the amount of acting out incidents that occurred between the children and their peers, post implementation.

Figure 4



The data in Figure 5 gives a summary of the amount of acting out incidents that occurred between the children and adults, post implementation.

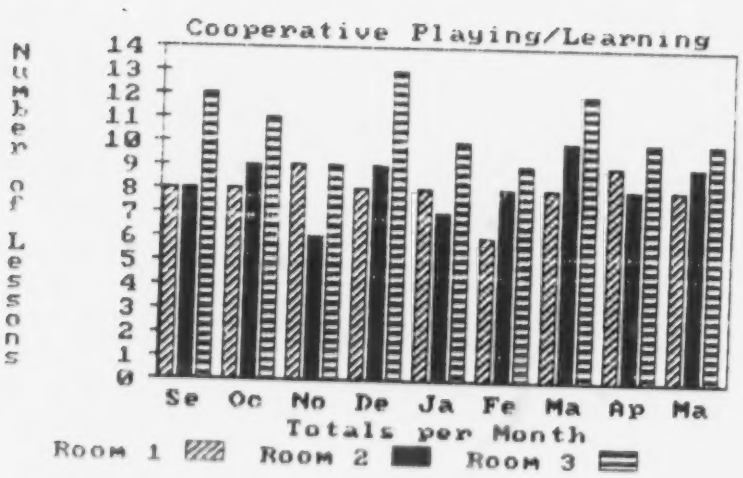
Figure 5



The second specific objective, "As a result of the practicum implementation, the three classroom teachers in the day care program will have at least two lessons per week included in their classrooms with the focus on cooperative play and learning," was met by the three classroom teachers. The second specfic objective was measured by the weekly lesson plans that were submitted to the writer.

The data in Figure 6 gives a summary of the total amount of lessons that were included in the classroom with the focus on cooperative play and learning.

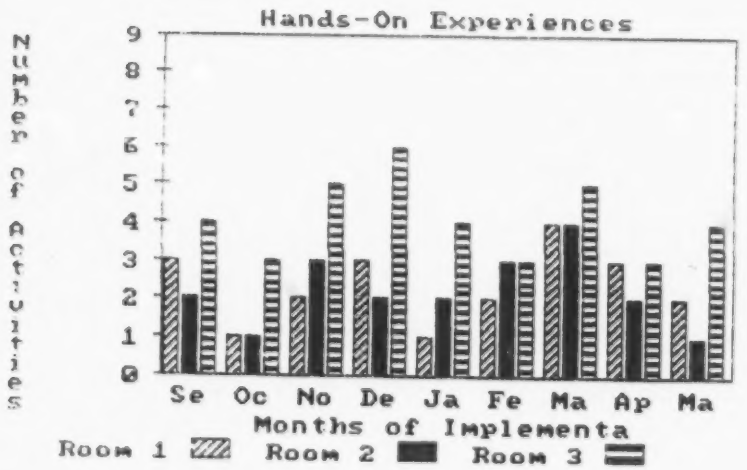
Figure 6



The third specific objective, "As a result of the practicum implementation, at least one activity each month will be incorporated in the curriculum that will be a "hands-on" experience" was met overwhelmingly. This objective was measured by a weekly calendar that documented the activities that were planned at the day care center.

The data in Figure 7 gives the number of activities that were incorporated into the curriculum during implementation that were "hands-on" experiences.

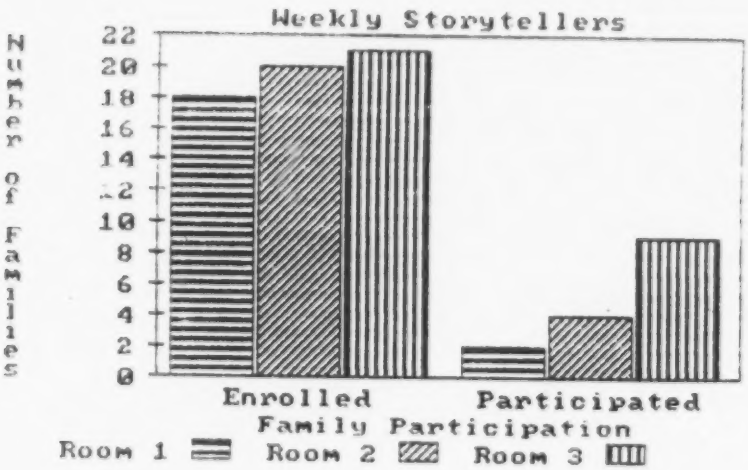
Figure 7



The last specific objective, stated that "at least once each week, one parent per classroom will become the weekly storyteller. The parents from the fifty-nine families will be involved", was only met by sixteen of the fifty-nine families. The fourth specific objective was measured by an attendance sheet (see Appendix D).

The data in Figure 8 gives a summary of the number of families that participated in the weekly storytellers sessions during implementation.

Figure 8



Two groups are listed in Figure 8, enrolled and participated. Enrolled are the total number of families in each classroom and the other group, participated, represents the number of enrolled families that actually participated in the weekly storytelling sessions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the writer feels that oral communication skills can be enhanced when educators become creative in developing their curriculum. Neighborhood and community resources must be included in the plans. Parents must be encouraged to continuously participate in the educational process of their children. The formation of diverse partnerships must be encouraged from all age groups, outside resources and community networks.

The importance of providing a variety of hands-on experiences has been shown to be effective in enhancing oral communication skills. The children learned more about handling aggressive behavior as their vocabulary skills developed. By compiling as many resources as possible and having a focal goal in mind, the children became the greatest benefactors.

Recommendations

The writer has three specific recommendations based on the results of this Practicum. First, the child care center shall incorporate into its' yearly curriculum projections visits to wholesome, appropriate and available public facilities as a means of expanding and enhancing oral communication skills in the early years of learning. The idea of "hands-on" experiences shall be upheld as an effective tool in the classroom. Second, there will be a continuation of the "Read To Me, Friends Bookclub", a club that incorporated a relationship between the children in the day care center and the older children in the third and fourth grades in the school. Third, the suggestions and methods introduced in the In-service training sessions of the Children's Literacy Initiative will become a permanent part of the day care classroom teaching style of whole language. Lastly, the parents will continue to be valued as the first educator of their young children and will be utilized as an important player in the partnership between school, community, family and child.

In the writer's opinion, one common goal of the family, the school and the community, all players involved in the life of young children, is that the children experience as much success as possible. With a goal such

as this, a vital ingredient in building a lasting relationship is conceived and developed as the goal is fulfilled. As oral communication skills are enhanced in children, another vital vehicle is offered which insures the evolution of a cooperative and supportive community, one that will transcend the expectations of all of the players involved.

Dissemination

The results of the practicum were shared in numerous ways. A copy was presented to the verifier of the practicum, the writer's Area Coordinator to be included in the shared professional library that is available at the areas cluster office to be shared with the lead teachers and staff of the cluster. One copy was presented to the school's principal and another to the director of the day care program to be utilized and available for their staff members. A copy was sent to the Pedagogical Library of the Board of Education. Lastly, the writer made available a copy to be shared with the staff and parents that participated in this prcticum to view the results.

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QUESTIONNAIRE OF PARENTS INTERESTED

IN RIF ACTIVITIES

APPENDIX A

Name_____

Child's Name_____

Room Number_____

1. Are you familiar with the Reading Is Fundamental Program, often referred to as RIF?

   Yes No

2. Did you participate in last years RIF activities?

   Yes No

3. Do you have any available time to participate in the RIF activities?

   Yes No

4. Would you be willing to assist in organizing the RIF activities for this school year?

   Yes No

5. Would you like to be on the book selection committee?

   Yes No

PLEASE CIRCLE ALL ANSWERS AND RETURN TO ROOM 205

ACTING OUT BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST
APPENDIX B

DATE	ROOM	NAME	OCCURRENCES									
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Comments

Numerical Codes

1. Hitting 2. Biting 3. Grabbing 4. Pushing
5. Kicking 6. Name calling 7. Not taking turns
8. Not sharing 9. Other

"A" in occurence box indicates with adult

"READ TO ME, FRIEND, BOOKCLUB" SURVEY

APPENDIX C

NAME_____

ROOM NUMBER_____

1. Do you like to read?

   Yes No

2. Are you in the third/fourth grade?

   Yes No

3. Do you like to work with younger children?

   Yes No

4. Are you willing to work with a younger child at least one hour each week?

   Yes No

PLEASE CIRCLE ANSWERS AND RETURN TO ROOM 205

SIGN-IN SHEET FOR PARENT STORYTELLERS

APPENDIX D

DATE	NAME	ROOM	CHILD'S NAME	IN	OUT

AGENDA I

APPENDIX E

I. Introduction

II. Warm-up Go Round/ Staff and Parents

III. Overview of Implementation Plans

IV. Projected Calendar

V. Recruitment for Volunteers

- A. RIF
- B. Weekly Storytellers

VI. Question and Answer Period

VII. Follow-up Activity

VIII. Closing Go Round

AGENDA II

APPENDIX F

I. Warm-up Go Round/ Staff and Parents

II. Overview of Scheduled Trips

III. Classroom Visitors

IV. Update on Volunteers

A. RIF

B. Weekly Storytellers

V. Question and Answer Period

VI. Follow-up Activity

VII. Closing Go Round

AGENDA III

APPENDIX G

I. Warm-up Go Round/ Staff and Parents

II. Introduction of Guest Speakers

III. Speaker /Topic "Getting Children to TALK, TALK and TALK by READ, READ, READING!!

IV. Question and Answer Period

V. Update on Volunteers

- A. RIF
- B. Weekly Storytellers

VI. Follow-up Activity

VII. Closing Go Round

AGENDA IV

APPENDIX H

I. Warm-up Go Round/ Staff and Parents

II. Summation of Implementation Activities

III. Projected Replication of Implementation

IV. Reflections from Volunteers

- A. RIF
- B. Weekly Storytellers

V. Question and Answer Period

VI Final Follow-up Exercise

VII. Closing Go Round

LESSON PLANS

APPENDIX I

Teacher.....Week Of.....19....Grade...

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday

Room Number.....Staff Position.....

Thursday	Friday	Remarks
		Comments

December 1990

APPENDIX J

WEEKLY CALENDAR

Sunday
3

Monday
10

Tuesday
11

Wednesday
12

Thursday
13

Friday
14

Saturday
15